

My neighbour and good friend Menachem

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I have had many good friends throughout my life. I remember them well, because they were an integral part of my life, each at a certain time, my partners in doings and activities and also those who together we walked for a while quietly and without many words, because there was a deep understanding between us. Many of these in my childhood, we parted and slowly the relationship broke down, our paths parted and only the beautiful memories remained. After the Holocaust, few remained scattered around the world, but we never met again.



My good friend Menachem was summoned by fate as early as our childhood and the connection with him did not end until his death, which came prematurely. Menachem's town, in many ways, was similar to the city where I was born. Two towns typical of the province of Slavonia, with communities of Jews, whose connection to religion, Jewish tradition and Jewish life, including the Yiddish language, hardly existed in their consciousness, but nevertheless were good Jews and enthusiastic Zionists. Menachem and I grew up in the same strange atmosphere of a kind of assimilation to a certain limit and loyalty to the Jewish people and the Zionist ideal. Our first meeting was on the occasion of the gathering of the Zionist youth of the King of Slavonia, in Menachem's town, Vinkovci. Menachem, a year and a half younger than me, was a young man like me who is active in the youth branch. From

the first moment we formed a bond of mutual understanding and friendship. Over the years we have met in youth meetings in different places. We deepened our Zionist activities, each in his own place, we grew into serious men. And each, in his own way, came to the conclusion that his future is immigration to the Land of Israel. It is interesting that in a certain period before we had a suitable framework for pioneering training, we both went through a training period, each in his own city, and we were both in the carpentry profession. This was not planned and the decision of each of us was random. When our movement began to organize for its training, I turned to Menachem to enlist him for the mission and for organizational work at the center. And he accepted with his characteristic willingness and devotion.



For years we worked together at our movement center which was for a while in the place of the agricultural training and then moved to Zagreb where the institutions of the Zionist movement were concentrated. Menachem was in charge of the movement's affairs for many years, and when I immigrated to Israel, he continued his work.



When I returned to Yugoslavia, in 1938, I found him together with Rivka, his wife and their daughter Hannah, who was born in the meantime. He was immersed in carrying the burden and concern for our movement. We worked together and the movement grew and expanded. The movement, which was built on the principle of sea conquest and education in preparation for the establishment of a seafaring settlement (Kibbutz). The agricultural training was nullified and in its place was established in the Adriatic Sea in Omis near to the city of Split, a Marine Training. Two residents and founders of Kidron were trained there, Simcha Ofer (Milchofer) from Osijek and Josef (Yuso) Salomon from Pristina. Menachem was a partner in all this activity and I would say that without him we would not have

progressed and developed, as much as the movement developed with his help.



Menachem and his family immigrated to Israel in 1938, where we spent some time together at Kibbutz Afikim in the Jordan Valley near the Sea of Galilee. Menachem went through World War II as an officer in the Yugoslav army. He fought on the Egyptian front and returned home sick with tuberculosis. His hospitalization on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem lasted a long time and with his recovery he joined his family who had meanwhile moved from Afikim to Petah-Tikva. In 1949, when our family left the kibbutz, I came to

Menachem and Rivka again and offered them to join a group of immigrants from Yugoslavia, whom I enlisted to guide towards their settlement as a workers' village in the south of the country.



Menachem accepted my offer without any hesitation, settled his affairs in Petah-Tikva and once again we were together, in the settlement nucleus of Yugoslavians, Holocaust survivors. Once again, we are embarking on a difficult task, as in the past.

The Holocaust, in its terrible cruelty, annihilated the Jews of Yugoslavia, and those who remained in exile immigrated to Israel with the establishment of the state of Israel. Our work with the people, who came and decided to start all over again, was littered with obstacles and difficulties. Lack of trust, suspicion, criticism and in addition the horrific past they went through, in which they saw their loved ones murdered and slaughtered and their property

destroyed, which led to a lack of trust in man, all these accompanied them in their first steps in the country. Menachem and I knew we had a difficult path with all these factors and its implications. Their lack of trust was also reflected in their attitude towards us, the representatives of the settlement institutions and the government in general. We had hard days but there were also many bright spots. Over the years our work has borne fruit, distrust has disappeared, or at least been reduced, the settlement on its settlers has developed nicely and every family has found in it a new home and a new life.



Over the years, Menachem and I set out on new missions, in addition to our activities in the village. We moved to work in the settlement department in the south of the country. Large and extensive area for diverse activities. The same treatment in a single settlement extended over many settlements. Here we can develop an initiative in the cooperative area, which includes many settlements and all in the new settlement after the establishment of the state. Together with a group of prominent activists in these settlements, we initiated the establishment of factories that solved, first of all, existential problems and at the same time, also the establishment of joint factories, a garage for repairing tractors, a factory for making concrete blocks for building the Settlement houses, a factory for laying water networks and buying organizations. We operated in social and cultural areas.

Years passed without the two of us parting, in our joint activity, for even one day. But at the same time and especially with Menachem's family and my family. We were neighbors living next to each other in a good and beautiful neighbor relationship. How did fate want us to be neighbors? When it came time for distributing the houses among the members of the settlement, it was decided on the opinion of all, that the distribution should be done so that

no one could ever come up with a claim that the distribution was unjust, or that it gave priority to someone over the others, so it was decided to hold a lottery. The names of the residents were written on notes and the numbers of the farms were written on other notes, as written on the settlement map. All the notes were put in boxes and in front of the people, the notes were mixed and a girl named Rachel Neufeld took out the winnings.

Prior to the lottery, it was agreed that a resident who won, can choose his neighbor if he so wished. Menachem suggested that I'll be the one to pull the note on behalf of both of us. The lot we got was in the center of the village, in front of the village institutions, the grocery store,



the school, the clinic and the People's center House building, which was built in later years.



Of course, the part of the farm east of my farm fell to Menachem and his family, and that's how we became neighbors. Rivka and Menachem had three children. The eldest daughter,



Hannah, who was born in Zagreb, died while they lived in Petah Tikva. There remained a cute daughter and two beautiful and good boys. Between Menachem's house and his farm and our estate, there was no fence and it was as if it were one big yard. Our children also felt free to run around and play in the open field. The houses we received were small and narrow to contain the whole family and after a year we started to expand it. We had no money and we used loans, we helped

each other and we were up to the task. We took our first steps in the farm together and the first blessed years were "many failures" and here and there also successes, I remember a year when we decided on sowing watermelons and everything went well until that bitter day, when we found the rabbits gnawed at all the watermelons And the beautiful dream of a decent profit has vanished. Over the years we have developed a mixed farm, with a barn and large calves, a poultry and orchard coop and a vegetable lot. We built warehouses in the yard of the farm and cultivated a gentile garden around the house and continued with activities in and outside the village.



By his nature and character, my friend Menachem was a comfortable man who loved people, loved society and had a public sense. For years he headed the village committee and at all times was among the activists and initiators. Menachem had an exemplary family, devoted to his village and willing to help every individual, in his distress and deprivation. The Keren family's house was open, fully prepared, we had a custom, for the group of activists, to come and stay with Menachem every Friday afternoon. In these meetings, over a cup of coffee and a delicious cake, made by Rivka, we spent an open and friendly conversation. And sometimes, as a result of these conversations, ideas arose for the advancement of the village, for a new enterprise, for social and cultural activities and anything else that is beneficial and good for our village. The members of the moshav got used to come to Menachem for income taxes matters and consulting with him on their private affairs, which sometimes touched on very intimate issues. The villagers knew about the friendships between me and Menachem, as well as the good neighborly relations between the two families. Most of the village favored this relationship, but there were also a few people who just envied us and tried to put some wedge between us. The same people came to me separately and so did to Menachem, and told about things that were not and were never been in our relationship. Following these attempts, we decided in an open conversation, as usual between us, to ignore the malicious intentions of the irresponsible people and the woods of the dishonest conspiracies. This has been our way throughout our years of acquaintance and friendship.



In Menachem's private family life there were lights and shadows. Usually up to a certain limit my hand was outstretched for help, to assist. We talked about everything openly and I knew that I could trust Menachem and he could trust me. But there are things that no one has the power to help or overcome. I cannot move on to the agenda and ignore the great troubles that have hurt Rivka and Menachem. The eldest daughter, Hannah, died while still in Petah Tikva. The second blow that was inflicted on them was when the cute and smart daughter



Dina was taken after a short illness. Rivka and Menachem's pain were deep and restrained and they found solace in their devotion to their two sons and devoted to them even more. Rivka was the main burden bearer regarding the economy, the home and its management. She was usually closed and confined within herself and her life clouded over her with concern for her family and quietly accompanying Menachem's extensive and intense activities. There were not many women in our village as diligent and persistent as Rivka. The hospitality of the Keren home should be seen as the equal right of Rivka and Menachem, who each in their own way made the visitor feel good and casual in their home. Rivka had agile gold hands. And even in the early periods of our acquaintance I knew she was trying, from time to time, her power in shaping figures from hardwood and wood. The need for

self-expression erupted in her as if in one day, and she began with orderly studies in Tel Aviv and continuous work at home. Her natural talent broke through and the sculpturing became an integral part of her.

The period of my absence from the country, for three years, was probably a rather difficult period for Menachem. Our political activities, as members of the "Mapai" political party, led to crises that also affected us personally. It is no coincidence that we were both loyal to Ben-Gurion's path, and during the split within the party we joined "Rafi" party. Menachem was severely hurt when, following his views, restrictions began on his activities in and out of the village. People who were considered good friends cheated on their friendships out of narrow accounts and turned out to be unreliable friends. When I returned home, Menachem told me about the mental suffering that was his lot at that time. Not many days passed after my return from abroad, and while I was with Shoshana my wife on a short vacation in Tel Aviv, I was called one evening to the telephone and the children told me about Menachem's sudden death. I immediately returned home to Kidron, entered Rivka and Menachem's house and Menachem was gone. I cried for the death of my good friend and with a few words to comfort the grieving Rivka. What can be said to a person whose fate has been so cruel and unjust. I knew and felt that



Rivka was fighting within herself for her mental and physical existence. We accompanied Menachem on his last journey to the limestone hill, the eucalyptus grove in the center of the village he loved so much and had devoted many years of blessed and constructive activity. Hard days passed on Rivka since the days of the training, movement activity, immigration to Israel, the kibbutz, Petah Tikva, an abandoned village and the building of our village. Rivka went a long way hand in hand with Menachem, as a motherly love and faithful partner. Now, I have hurt her pain and also my pain at the loss of the dear friend of mine. Rivka over the years overcame the terrible blow, or rather she never overcame but continued life with carrying the eternal and unforgettable pain.

The two sons, in their devotion to mother and home, made life somewhat easier without Menachem. Ilan and Amos grown to be adult men, each looking for his own way in life and became a bright spot in Rivka's life, who accompanied their steps with worry and anxiety.



Ilan ended his military service as an armored officer, returned to his farm and also began working in a job outside the village. The time does its thing, it usually looks like this to the outside world, and the family lives their lives again immersed in work in the hen house, in the field and around the house. Rivka tries to keep everything in place, the house is always tidy, hot meals at a time adapted to the boys' work, people come and go and ask for the well-being of the family members. We, moved to our new home across the limestone hill on the south side of the village, while Menachem was still alive. We handed over our house and land to our eldest son Gidi. The neighborhood period ended, but the relationship continued as in days gone by. When Menachem passed away, I felt a certain emptiness in the village, and in general I went out with Shoshana for a three-year mission to South America, there were many

changes in the village and Menachem also left us, and I no longer found the connection to the village. The village, Menachem and myself, as if we were one concept for me. The atmosphere in the village changed, many of the old friends passed away, some of them sold their farm and moved to the city. New people came, other ideas came to the session and their approach to social life, built on the principles of partnership, mutual help and cohesive economic and economic foundations, changed.

Thus, In the changes that time has caused and many other reasons, of an internal and external nature, the Yom Kippur War descended upon us. The whole nation is surprised, it happened as an unexpected thing, the people in the Yom Kippur prayer in the synagogues, gathered within themselves, the roads empty of a living soul and the movement of vehicles, a sabbatical full in the full sense of the word. A surprise attack found

the settlement unprepared. Enemy armies are advancing on the southern and northern fronts and endangering our existence. The cities and villages are emptied of their sons who came to the camps and from there to the front, the place of battles. Ilan was among those who arrived first in their units and immediately took their place in the front rows. As an officer commander of tanks unit, he entered the battle of the Syrians in the Golan Heights. Ilan was among the boys whose bodies stopped the progress of the invaders. Can I now take the words out of my



mouth and put them on this paper? Words of the Gospel of Job about Ilan's death in battle. I sat next to Rivka again, there were no words in my mouth again, she whispered All the time: "I have no more strength to continue living, why me? Why me? ...". Ilan's grave is close to that of Menachem and some distance from his sister Dina. It is not a story; it is a cruel truth about Menachem and Rivka's family. Amos stays with Rivka. The citrus plantation is watered, the chickens are fed on time, in the yard behind the house are Rivka's Sculptures, some have been completed and some are awaiting their final design. I visit Rivka sometimes, the house is tidy as always, I look around me and every object and from every corner cries out this superhuman pain, maybe this is how I feel, because I have walked with them and together a long way in our lives.

Amos is celebrating his wedding day. The joy of Rivka is the joy of the whole village and of their many friends. In the hearts of all, prayer and hope that good days will come and the light will return to the precious home. Some say that when the prayers in the hearts of many reach the throne of the God he willingly accepts. No, the prayers that have probably not reached the throne of the God, or that he has forgotten from most of the prayers that come to him, those about Rivka and her house. Not many days passed and Rivka went on a trip, to a meeting with immigrants from Yugoslavia in Netanya. Just a day before the first planned trip to go abroad. For a long time, she wanted to visit Italy and see the sculpturing works and paintings of the great artists of the heyday. The trip to Netanya, together with the Santo family and Sonia Deri, all good friends of the Kidron first settlers, started in a great mood ahead of their meeting with a lot of acquaintances and friends, at the intersection before Netanya, the bus coming towards them, hit the car, crushed and destroyed it and all its occupants were killed on the spot, except for Rivka who was seriously injured. In the hospital, where Rivka was brought from the accident, she received first aid, treatment and subsequent surgeries and her life was saved. Many days after regaining consciousness, Rivka was not told the fate of her friends that were in the car with her, but was finally told of the disaster. Many days, too many, Rivka was hospitalized.



During my visit to her, she talked about her determined decision to return to her strength and normal functions so that she would not need a stroller and to return to her sculpturing work. Rivka's willpower led her to, after many treatments, slowly get back on her feet and start working at home again, in the hen house and most important with her sculptures. Meanwhile we left the village and we moved to the city. On our visits to Kidron we see Rivka overcoming physical limitations, moving and actively creating sculptures, many of which adorn public places in Kidron and elsewhere in the country. The son Amos is busy with his wife and their children, Rivka's grandchildren, living in their new home next to her, the family life and her blessed sculpturing work maybe, maybe they are a reward for years of suffering she passed and on Keren family home.